

Caught in the Web: *Spider-Man's* Reeve Carney Keeps Audiences Captive (and Breathless!)

BY MELANIE BAKER

Look up! Look right. Wait, left. Whatever you do, don't blink! You might miss the torpedo-speed, web-slinging, head-to-toe spandex-clad superhero whizzing past you. That's right, you're sitting in the coveted pulse-raising flying circle of Broadway's *Spider-Man: Turn Off the Dark*, so be prepared to surrender yourself to two-and-a-half-plus hours punctuated with acrobatic flips, zip lines, motor pulls, and assorted other techno-physical special effects from a fiercely talented cast and crew who totally deliver the sort of sensory overload—Goliath-scale video screens, architecturally skewed NYC backdrops, a soaring overhead battle you'll never forget—that leaves you awestruck.

Having opened nearly a year ago, *Spider-Man's* red-hot popularity shows no signs of letting up, thanks to big buzz and a company that includes Tony Award nominee Robert Cuccioli as scientist Norman Osborn/ultra-villain the Green Goblin, Katrina Lenk as the spider goddess Arachne, and Rebecca Faulkenberry as Mary Jane Watson. And it certainly doesn't hurt that rocker/actor Reeve Carney, who created the dual role of Peter Parker (lovable dork) and Spider-Man (suave metropolis-saving vigilante) on Broadway, is still with the company.

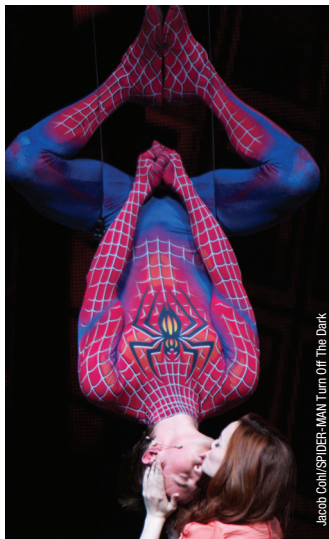
With a rock music background and a bona fide band to tout, Carney never planned for a career on Broadway. It

was through his group ("Carney") that he expected his career to take flight. Jolt forward to an incredible opportunity: U2 signs on to write the music for a new *Spider-Man* musical. The fit seemed odd, and questions arose as to whether or not Bono and The Edge's symbolic sound—teeming with signature power chords, even in their most romantic of ballads (in this case, songs oozing teen angst and passion)—would strike out when compared to far less edgy, traditional musical theatre scores.

As the public awaited the first notes from the score, Carney found himself presented with a gig he couldn't pass up: the title role in the groundbreaking musical U2 was working on. "It's probably one of the things that created the great opportunity for me," he says of the rock tonality that glazes songs

like Peter Parker's power ballad "Rise Above."

As Carney points out, while writing the score, Bono and The Edge had "a pretty specific voice" in mind, and luckily his crafted rasp and vocal gusto were an ideal fit. And while he did have some concern about the effect a Broadway debut would



Reeve Carney and Rebecca Faulkenberry share a kiss in *Spider-Man*

Jacob John/SPIDER-MAN Turn Off the Dark

"[Playing Spider-Man] is really fun...but also terrifying."

have on his band's credibility, he ultimately knew he'd regret passing it up: "When I'm 80 years old, I'd feel really bad if I looked back and didn't take this job."

As *Spider-Man*, Carney, who just turned 29, is required to hang upside-down, fly on a motor line, save the world, and rescue M.J. as she dangles off a bridge—eight times a week. The stamina required for the role didn't come easy at first. "It takes a lot of focus," he admits.

"I'm pretty aware of my body. Having that sort of awareness helps you improve on something like ['Bouncing Off the Walls']," a number that involves moving panels, and Carney being pulled in every direction possible while belting out electrifying vocals. "It's a big challenge vocally and physically," he says, adding, "It's really fun but also terrifying."

And let's face it, it's hard to imagine

many swoon-worthy actors of Carney's caliber striking such an effortless balance between vulnerability and fearlessness show after show after show.

Fortunately for audiences, Carney isn't ready to hang up the famous superhero suit just yet—although he was slated to end his run in May. "They don't seem to want to kick me out quite yet," he says.

Like *Spider-Man* in the grand finale: we win!

Did you know...

- Reeve is a distant relative of Art Carney (Ed Norton on the sitcom classic *The Honeymooners*)?
- While Reeve soars on Broadway, brother Zane keeps up their band website: carneyband.com?
- Reeve is particularly impressed with the show's intergenerational—and international—family appeal? Because of its spectacular visuals, he notes, "It kind of transcends language barriers."

Spider-Man: Turn Off the Dark is playing at the Foxwoods Theatre, 213 W. 42nd St. For tickets, call 877-250-2929 or visit spidermanonbroadway.marvel.com.

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